

# Proposed gun control law one of contradictions

The 2015 Oregon Legislature is shaping up to be one of contradictions – more gun control for those who obey the law but possibly more government protection for those who have broken the law.

We're about to increase background checks on private gun sales, which will do nothing to stop felons from continuing to illegally obtain and use firearms.

At the same time, legislation has been proposed that would make it harder for an employer to do a criminal background check on felons.

Yes, this is a very contentious legislative session. Many bills are on a fast track. If we don't slow down and become more thoughtful, we're going to pass some bad laws, and citizens will pay the price.

Last year, during the legislature's brief 35-day session, state Sen. Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene) tried to rush approval of a gun control bill to expand background checks. He needed just one more vote, and I declined to give it. I didn't think his bill would reduce crime. I wish all it took to change human behavior was passing legislation. It doesn't work that way.

Prozanski is back this year with a similar bill, and this time he has the votes. That doesn't mean he has a good bill.

His Senate Bill 941 requires that any time a private citizen sells or transfers a firearm both the seller and buyer/recipient must go to a licensed gun dealer, and pay to have the buyer undergo a criminal background check.

On the face of it this seems rea-

sonable. Think about it, though. If you know you have a criminal history, you'll bypass this law: Have somebody else buy a gun for you, or obtain one on the black market. It's already against the law for ex-felons to possess a firearm. Yet, how often do we read about ex-felons committing a crime, and they're armed? It takes more than laws to disarm a criminal.

However, a law can disarm a non-criminal. Under the proposed legislation, a gun owner with no criminal history could find himself in violation if he loans a hunting rifle to a friend without a background check. On a first offense, the punishment could be one year in jail and/or a \$6,250 fine. On a second offense, the punishment could reach 10 years in prison and/or a \$250,000 fine.

Given Prozanski's legislative history, I have to ask: Does he really want to go after violent felons? Or does he want to cause problems for legitimate gun owners?

Two years ago Prozanski served on the governor's Commission on Public Safety, where he worked on House Bill 3194. He pushed unsuccessfully to reduce the sentences for some robbery, assault and sexual abuse crimes.

Even more revealing, Prozanski wanted to expand expungement – a way for felons to wipe clean their criminal history to help them find housing and employment. Now here he is sponsoring a bill that requires background checks on gun purchases.

## GUEST COLUMN

By  
SEN.  
BETSY  
JOHNSON



**We're about to increase background checks on private gun sales, which will do nothing to stop felons from continuing to illegally obtain and use firearms.**

What good does it do to require background checks, if you're also helping felons rewrite their criminal records?

As it is, the public might be surprised how often expungements and sealed records are allowed. I checked with one of the District Attorneys in my district – Clatsop County's Josh Marquis – and found that his office alone grants at least 100 expungements or sealed record requests a year.

Once an adult's criminal record is sealed it may not appear on the Law Enforcement Data System, the National Crime Information Center, the older Or-

egon Judicial Information Network or the newer Odyssey court system. Prozanski's bill does not address this.

There are aspects of his gun bill that are worthy – for example, prohibiting persons undergoing court-ordered outpatient treatment from possessing a firearm. However, confidentiality laws make it difficult to even reveal who is mentally ill. The bill does nothing to protect the public from a person whose mental illness expresses itself in violence.

The overriding intent of Prozanski's bill is not directed at violent behavior but at making gun ownership more inconvenient for the law-abiding.

Nevertheless, it will pass and will be trumpeted as making the public safer.

Meanwhile, the bill assisting ex-felons in the job market makes for a curious counterpoint. If you support Prozanski's gun bill, take note.

Say you're an employer and you also hate guns. You may find yourself unwittingly offering a job to someone who has committed armed robbery. If you then want to rescind the job offer, you may have some explaining to do to a state official.

House Bill 3025, also called the ban-the-box law because of the box on some job applications asking if an applicant has a criminal record, would restrict how private employers can interview job applicants.

No inquiry could be made about an applicant's criminal history, nor could a background check be conducted, until after a

job has been offered. Only then could the employer seek a background check. If something turned up, the employer could rescind the offer if the conviction was related to the nature of the job. The applicant could then appeal to the state Bureau of Labor and Industries.

It's popular to say that this is a well-intentioned law, but you know what? It isn't. This is the kind of law that creates animosity. The bill as currently written is clearly designed to give one select group of job applicants a cudgel – the threat of legal action – to force compliance from employers. In this job market, there are a lot of qualified people who can't find suitable work. Why should ex-felons get a special break?

There are already federal tax incentives to encourage employers to hire ex-felons. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program has been around since 1996 and has been renewed ever since.

Some employers have made it known that they like to hire people with criminal backgrounds.

Dick Withnell, a Salem auto dealer, has spoken at legislative hearings about hiring employees out of prison. He's to be commended for that. But it's his choice. Freedom of choice is a beautiful thing. It's better than political force.

The ban-the-box bill has had a hearing before the House Business and Labor Committee, where advocates for ex-felons and prisoner's rights were well-organized with their testimony.

If it doesn't pass this session, like Prozanski's gun bill it will likely come around again.

## At the Library CARLA O'REILLY

# Here's to our many library volunteers and supporters

April is the month we gratefully celebrate our many volunteers and supporters. From 2 to 4 p.m. this coming Saturday, April 25, we will be hosting an event at the library to express our appreciation to all who have helped us so much – becoming library members, volunteering, and contributing financially to help us keep our doors open. Each supporter will have a coupon for one free book from our book sale as a special thank you. Come join us as we bask in the warmth of the fireplace, listen to live music provided by Gary Keiski and The Coconuts, and enjoy much fellowship and good cheer. Beverages and desserts will be provided.

### Children's Book Week

The 96th Annual Children's Book Week will be from May 4-10. This nationwide commemoration is the longest-running national literacy initiative in the country and is all about the celebration of books. Every year, com-

memorative events are held from coast to coast at schools, libraries, bookstores, homes – wherever young readers and books connect. This is a good opportunity for parents and grandparents to encourage children to read. Electronics are great learning tools and, of course, physical activities – especially outdoor activities – are wonderful and necessary for kids. But there's nothing like curling up with a good book and sometimes our youngsters need a little encouragement. For more information, visit [www.bookweekonline.com](http://www.bookweekonline.com).

### Northwest Author Series

We will be hosting Northwest author Don Waters at 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 9. He will be talking about his hilarious first novel, *Sunland: A Novel*. The book features the misadventures of a man in his mid-thirties who takes a break from working a job in order to care for his beloved grandmother. To minimize the cost of her prescriptions, he begins smuggling medi-



CARLA O'REILLY

cations over the border. Don't miss this entertaining event.

### Cannon Beach Reads

Our reading group, Cannon Beach Reads, will be meeting from 7 to 8:30 p.m. on May 20 at the library. This month the group will be reading and discussing *The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal, and the Real Count of Monte Cristo*, by author Tom Reiss. The book, which is a biography of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for biography or autobiography. General Dumas's son, the writer Alex-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

It take a village to run a library, as was the case in 2006 when volunteers and supporters gathered for this photo.

andre Dumas, based his novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*, on his father's life. New readers are always welcome.

### Membership Meeting

Annual library membership dues of \$10 may be paid when we have our monthly

meeting at 10 a.m. May 6. A light brunch will be served and the election of new board members, as well as officers, will be the featured business of the morning.

### Book Donations

Finally, the 4th of July

might seem far in the future at this point, but the sooner we can get book donations, the better, according to Jean Furchner. So pack up those used books as soon as possible and bring them to the library. Tax donation forms are available.

## Boac's Bird Notes SUSAN BOAC

# Farewell 'Your Grandma,' you have served us well

Hey, what's with the photo of the broken down van with this week's birding column? Did the wrong picture get placed?

Nope, in fact, this van, which first belonged to my parents and then me, has logged at least half of its 157K miles while birding. Like a good pair of binoculars and a scope, this piece of equipment was very important to my family and friends.

My parents birded all over Oregon, especially this time of year when it's great to plan a trip to hot migrating spots like

Klamath Falls or Coos Bay.

But the story ends here. With one hour left in the birdathon, the decision had been made. "Your Grandma," the van's name, unexpectedly died.

Our team was at the Eagle Sanctuary in Knappa. We had seen over 80 species of birds already and were quickly running out of time. We could go to Coxcomb Hill or Wireless Road in Astoria, but not both. As it turned out, Your Grandma had the final vote. As we turned on to Hwy 30 – CLuNK CLAnK BOOM – we quickly realized we were



SUSAN BOAC

not going anywhere!

The highlights of the day was the absolute joy to be birding all day with my two



SUSAN BOAC PHOTO

Fondly named "Your Grandma," this van gave its all for birding.

friends and raising money for the Wildlife Center of the North Coast, seeing three first-of -year (FOY) species:

brown pelican, black-throated gray warbler and red-breasted sapsucker, and enjoying seeing two pairs of cinnamon teal

in a pond in Brownsmead.

All in all, a great success. Now, off to find a new "birdy" vehicle!

Susan has spent her life enjoying the great outdoors from the lakes and woods of Northern Minnesota, Mt. Adams in Washington and now the Oregon beach environs. After spending many pleasurable hours driving her avid birder parents around, she has taken up birding as a passion, to the mixed emotions of her husband Scott. The Boacs reside on the Neavanna Creek in Seaside where their backyard is a birder's paradise.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Why is City Council 'waffling'?

I have been following the deliberations of the Cannon Beach City Council regarding the proposed development at 532 N. Laurel and am appalled at the willingness of the City Council to disregard the Planning Commission's well reasoned denial of this project. The city's zoning provisions are clear with regard to the integrity of development within the city limits. I have yet to discover what reasoning the City Council is using to justify their waffling, having originally supported the Planning Commission's decision then ignoring it. I have owned a home on the north end of Cannon Beach for over thirty-five years and have a deep and abiding interest in the commu-

nity. I am shocked that the group of citizens who represent the opposition to this decision were denied a voice at the City Council meeting. I have to wonder what machinations have brought about this fiat.

Susan Keizer  
Davis, California

### Kids deserve safe schools

To the editor,  
My heart went out to the young man who recently spoke at the town hall forum about needing a school in Cannon Beach. It would be nice if our politicians, instead of just providing candy-coated comments, could actually give accurate answers. Public school money in this area will go to consolidating schools

and making them safer. Safer means eliminating structural problems with a Cascadia earthquake, locating them outside of the tsunami inundation zone, and controlling access to prevent shootings and takeovers.

Leaders should concentrate on gaining voter approval for the following plan on which they have already been briefed – structurally upgrade Seaside Heights Elementary (state money is available now); and pass a new bond issue for one-third of the amount that was originally put before the voters. Property taxes on second homeowners pay 80 percent of these bond repayments with local taxpayers paying an amount that is equivalent to a cigarette a day per person. Use this bond money to build a new middle and high school above the existing Seaside Heights parking lot (out of the

tsunami zone) that eliminates additional land costs and minimizes infrastructure costs.

Do it now before bond interest rates rise. Adults owe kids a safe functional public school. Community leaders owe property owners efficient use of their tax dollars.

John Dunzer  
Seaside

### Trees are vital

To the editor,  
Trees are vital to the beauty and environment health of our Cannon Beach community. From alders to cedars, hemlocks to spruce, we're blessed with an abundance of native